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Image via FOX

Listen, and Understand: Interview with Josh Friedman

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Reminiscing about *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*

Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles premiered on Fox ten years ago, as a midseason replacement in the winter of 2008, and wound up running for thirty-one episodes over two seasons (the first shortened because of a writers' strike) before the network yanked the plug. Bad move, Fox.

I could quote critics galore — *The New York Times* called *The Sarah Conner Chronicles* "taut, haunting, relevant and an exploration of adolescent exceptionalism rendered without the cheerleading uniforms and parody of "Heroes," for example — but let's dispense with preliminaries and go right to *Terminator* mahatma James Cameron, who created the franchise, directing and co-scripting the first two films, and who who wound up hiring the TV series' showrunner, Josh Friedman, twice, once for *Avatar 2* and once for the upcoming untitled *Terminator* reboot. High praise indeed.

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TSSC starred Brit Lena Headey — now lording over Westeros as the arctic Cersei Lannister in HBO's phenomenal *Game of Thrones* — in the title role, made famous in the first two films by Linda Hamilton; it's never easy to assume an iconic role, but the great John Leonard of *New York* magazine, among others, was smitten: "Headey . . . has about her the adult sexuality and lacerated pride of a Liv Ullmann, the flamboyant weariness of a Melina Mercouri, and the Druidic ferocity of Boadicea, the queen of the Britons who took on Nero in the first century A.D. and cut the Ninth Roman Legion to pieces." Plus, he added, she can crack wise.

Thomas Dekker, twenty years old when the show debuted, and already a veteran actor (having broken in at the age of five), was the young John Connor, future resistance leader. Summer Glau, geek fantasy goddess since appearing in Joss Whedon's *Firefly,* portrayed Cameron, the T-900 humanoid Terminator reprogrammed and dispatched to the past from the year 2027 to bodyguard John and ensure his survival.

We spoke recently with Friedman about the series; the following transcript was edited for length:

Paley Center: How did you get attached to this project?

Josh Friedman: It was pretty straightforward. I had worked with Warner Bros. television a couple of times before and my memory is that James Middleton, who kind of worked with the *Terminator* franchise — it was his original idea to do a show. He pitched it to Warners, and they said, "Yeah, we'd love to do a show." They didn't know what it was, just that it was a show that took place after *T2,* when Sarah was still alive. Warners said, "We've worked with Josh Friedman before; we'd love to give him a crack at it." I did a couple of things with them and they called me, "Would you be interested in a new idea that we have?" And I said, "I'm trying to work on an original idea, and unless you have something for me that I couldn't think of myself, I'm just gonna work on an original idea." They said, "How about the *Terminator* franchise? Is that something you could think of yourself?" And I said, "No," and we had a twenty-minute conversation about it, where they said, "Why don't you go try to think of what you would do and come in and pitch it to us?"

PC: Were you a big fan of the films?

JF: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

PC: The kind of fan where you saw each one ten times, or just a regular fan?

JF: Probably somewhere between the two. I don't see any movie ten times. I was a huge Cameron fan. I couldn't tell you how many times I'd seen them. I felt like I knew every single moment. You only have to see them once or twice to know how phenomenal the character is and how phenomenal the world is. Like a lot of Jim's stuff, I think that the more time you spend with it the deeper that stuff gets, thematically and the dramatic possibilities.

Image via Empire

PC: Do you think the TV version has a central theme that you were most interested in?

JF: I think it evolved. We did thirty-one episodes. Originally I came at it from a character place, and from a mother-son relationship place. I was a new parent, I had an eighteen-month-old at the time, a boy, and I think that the Sarah Connor–John Connor relationship was always the place to start thematically. I think that sort of parent idea — it's actually in one of the voice-overs— that everyone thinks their child is the Messiah, and in this case it's true. I always thought of it as a family saga. I remember when we pitched it that was talked about a lot. Over time it was always that, but it's hard to do *Terminator* without talking about the nature of artificial intelligence or fate versus free will, stuff like that. There were tons of things that we were exploring thematically, but it all started from the family unit.

PC: You went through a very serious health issue after signing on to this project, but before you started writing. Are you OK talking about that?

JF: Yeah, I sold the pitch and then within a few weeks got diagnosed with kidney cancer, so I ended up taking a couple of extra months. Before I started writing the pilot I had surgery, and recovered. And then I went to write. It certainly somewhat recalibrated the things I was interested in, as it related to Sarah. It was interesting because in the movie she got cancer and died, and I thought, "That's really interesting. What if she [time-]jumped over that event? What does that mean? Is it still inside of her? Is it inevitable?" And that became fate versus free will. "No fate but what we make for ourselves" was obviously a big line from the movies. And yeah, it was something that I was dealing with in my own life, which was, "Is this thing always going to be inside me? Can I avoid it from now on?" So it definitely was something that drove some stuff for me. I guess I would say it wasn't particularly overt in the series, but it was there.

PC: Do you think you would have had a substantially different show if you hadn't gone through that experience?

JF: I don't know. When I watched some of the episodes again, there are things in almost every episode that are just weird little peculiarities of my personality or things I was interested in at the time. Obviously that was one of the biggest things I ever experienced in my life. It's hard to say that I would have written the exact same show or relatively the same show. I think it definitely was informed by that.

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I almost quit the show before I started writing it, after I got sick. I just didn't know if I could do it, if that's where I wanted to put my time. I had a little, mini-crisis, and when I started thinking about Terminators as just the inevitability of our mortality, as the idea that we're being followed by death and that it's really a matter of time before they catch us. Once I kind of wrapped my brain around that, I thought, "Of course I can write the show. This *is* the show I'm supposed to be writing."

There used to be a voice-over by Sarah at the beginning of the first episode, and it was the first words I wrote when I recovered: "I will die. I will die and so will you. Death gives no man a pass." When I wrote those lines, and I remember exactly where I was sitting when I wrote them, I thought, "Oh, I got it. I have it figured out." That voice-over was in almost up until the end, not right before we aired it, but when we were mixing it.

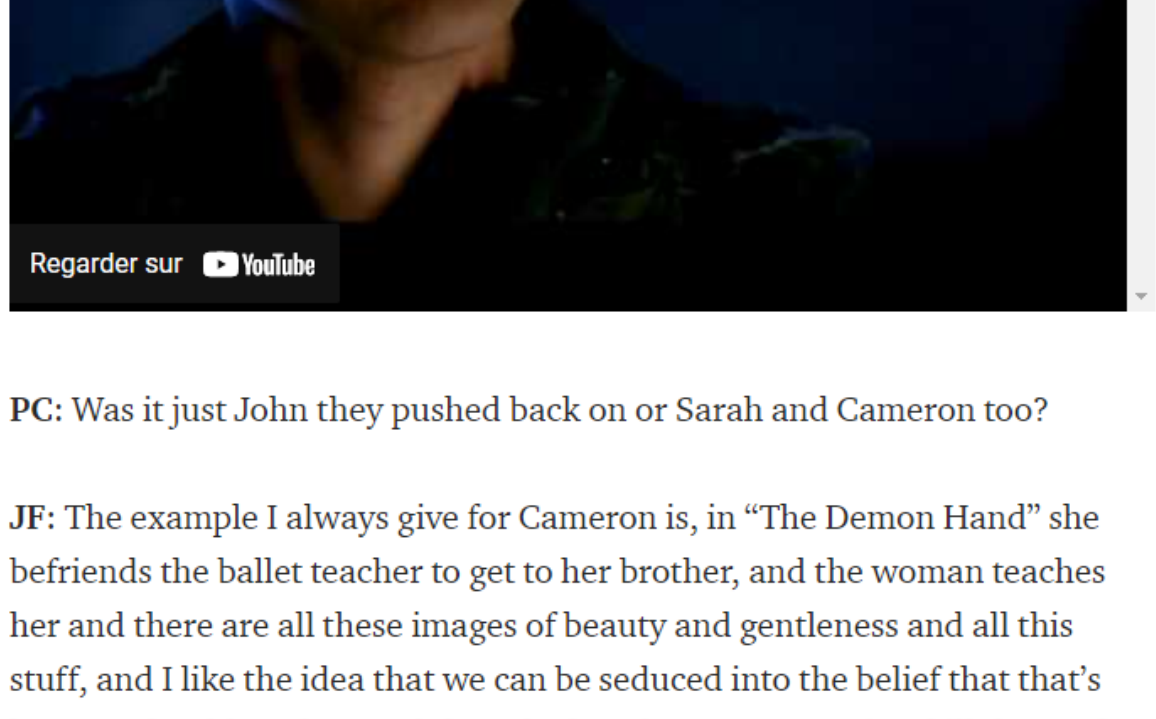
The network made me take it out. It was just too arc for them. And I kept saying, one, this is what the show is, and two, this is what we are, as people. But I guess you don't want to be reminded of that all the time on network television.

PC: It also seems analogous, listening to you talk right now, in that it was tempting for John and Sarah to give up sometimes, because it was such a difficult, unrelenting fight, and yet they didn't.

JF: It's funny, I'm kind of a big proponent of quitting. I don't say that to my son, but one of the things I did not want to do on the show — and this is very challenging — was to create heroes who were not flawed. I wanted their flaws to be the types of flaws that we have as people, and a lot of those have to do with wanting to give up or not having courage or being afraid or failing, and not in a noble way, necessarily. Curling up in a ball at times is OK.

I wrote this piece, I actually put it on my Twitter like six or eight months ago, when John McCain got diagnosed and they were writing about what a courageous solider he is and he went through this thing in Vietnam, etc. I thought that that sort of hero iconography for cancer and battle language really doesn't do anyone any service, and for a lot of cancer survivors and people who go through it. I was definitely one, being terrified and thinking, "This is bigger than I am and I can't control." It is important to accept that and not to feel bad about yourself if you're not John McCain, and it ended up being a piece that got picked up and put in *Time* magazine. It's really about how I think it's OK to be a coward; we don't have to put a value judgment on fear.

There were definitely points in the show where I wanted to write about these characters being able to be like that. John [Connor], certainly in season one, is very reluctant to take on the mantle of who he is. I think if you go to the end of season two, the last five minutes, it's sort of, "Careful what you wish for, John." He never met his father; in the end he gets to meet his father. He couldn't fall in love with Cameron because she was a — I mean he did fall in love with her, even though she was a Cyborg — but he gets to meet the flesh version of her. And his name, John Connor, which has been constantly shifting for two years, is taken away, since there's no power to it, and there's no weight to it. He's given anonymity, and he has no expectations from the outside world that he should be anybody. He's just a kid; it's almost like he's literally born again, given the things he wants, and where does that lead him? And I liked the idea that at the end, when he's becoming ready to be a hero, now the world is saying, "You know what? We don't need you." Or, "You're gonna have to work for it, from the ground up. Now *you* can decide what you want to be." I liked that idea. I think the studio and the network were — they're always scared that you're gonna create characters who are quote-unquote unlikeable or unsympathetic or don't do the thing that people want them to do, and I was kind of pushed against that.



PC: Was it just John they pushed back on or Sarah and Cameron too?

JF: The example I always give for Cameron is, in "The Demon Hand" she befriends the ballet teacher to get to her brother, and the woman teaches her and there are all these images of beauty and gentleness and all this stuff, and I like the idea that we can be seduced into the belief that that's how we should see her, and then she lets these monsters just kill them. She walks right by them, she doesn't stop them, because it's not her job, it's not her mission, and I love the idea that she's not moral, she's on mission. I remember when I handed it in to the studio, we got this really strong negative reaction, which was, "People are gonna hate her. She doesn't save them."

PC: On the subject of Cameron — what a brilliant piece of casting. Summer Glau doesn't seem like a warrior. She's like this delicate, waif-like ballet dancer. How did it come to be Summer Glau?

JF: I kind of wrote it for her. I had tried to cast her years earlier in a pilot and she actually went and did the *Firefly* movie [*Serendipity*] instead, which was a good move, I think. So I lost her, and I always thought, "She's so interesting and she just has this otherness to her, this weirdness that I liked." There was just something about her. And I knew that she was a ballet dancer and I knew that she had really great body control.

We saw a lot of actors, and there was some reason why she kept not being able to come in. My casting director kept bringing in — this was right when *Heroes* was kind of big, and I kept feeling like I was seeing all these *Heroes* cheerleader types coming in. I kept saying to my casting director, "If you bring in one more blonde cheerleader I'm gonna just go ballistic. Where is Summer Glau?" She said, "Do you really wanna see her?" and I said, "Of course, I had her in my head when I wrote it." So she came in and she was fantastic and she's one of only probably two actors who I ever thought, "Without a doubt I know this is exactly who it has to be," and she was perfect.

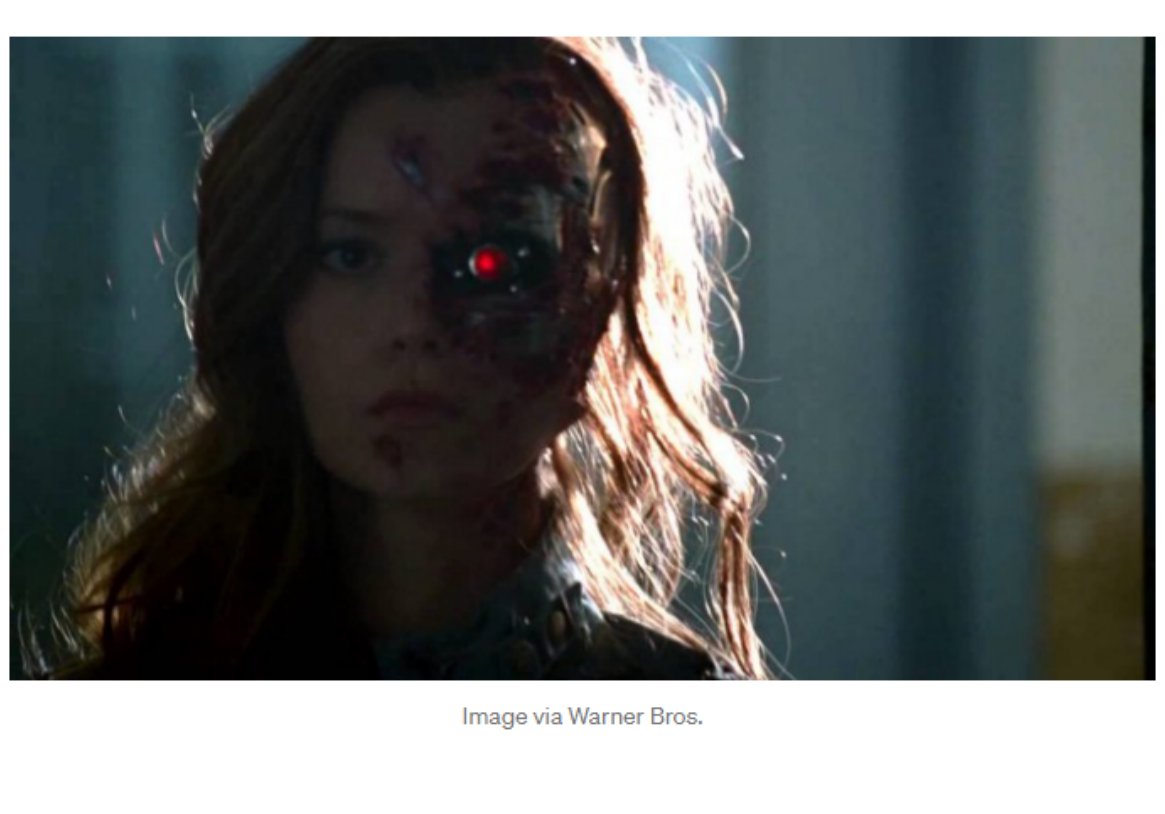


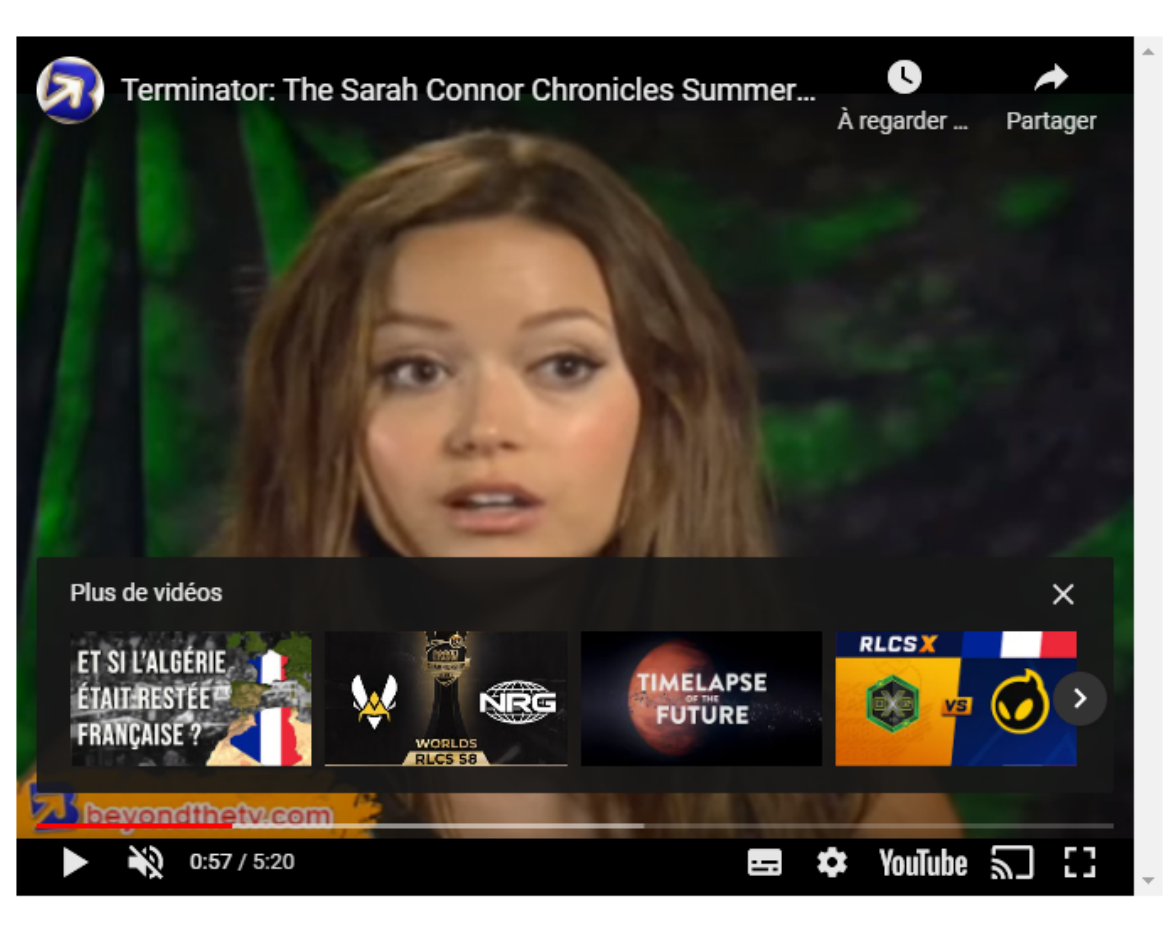
Image via Warner Bros.

I think her ballet training made such a difference. Also, she's incredibly intelligent about the choices she makes, down to the millimeter. I was actually just watching a commentary track on [second-season episode] "Born to Run," and it reminded me that she would do things sometimes on takes, she would make this little head twitch or body move, and the director would always think it was a mistake, and they would tell her not to do it anymore, and if I wasn't on the set she would get it in her head like, "I know this is what I'm supposed to be doing, I know this is what Josh would want." I would go through, in editing it, and there would always be one take where she did this perfect thing and then six takes where the director had changed it, and I would always use the one take where she had done the perfect thing, because she was so calibrated. She's just really gifted — I can't say enough about her.

PC: What was your thinking when you decided to make that character female instead of male?

JF: I thought that it was the natural progression of the series in terms of what those characters represented, what those protector Terminators represent. In the first *Terminator,* Kyle Reese is a romantic lead in a sense for Sarah. In *T2* the protector is a father figure for John. And I thought that if we're going to tell a Connor coming-of-age story in the show, it seemed like it had to be a third point in the triangle, between mother and son, and I thought that seems to be romantic. I don't think I ever thought it would be anything else.

PC: It's an interesting dynamic, between Sarah and Cameron. Unlike in *T2,* where the protector Terminator is male [Arnold Schwarzenegger], you never get the sense that Sarah has any anything but extreme dislike for Cameron. How do you see that dynamic?



JF: She never, ever trusts her. I think on one level she doesn't trust her because she's a Terminator, and she's seen them, and she knows. I think that in her gut, she doesn't trust Cameron because she knows she's pulling John in. She's competing with her for John's loyalty; Cameron's this third point in the triangle, and she [Sarah] is gonna lose John to Cameron, which is what happens.

PC: Sarah even says to Cameron at one point, "I don't like the way that John responds to you."

JF: She knows. She's never going to be won over by her, and I don't know that she should be. Look at what happens at the end: he leaves [Sarah]. Look, I think it's inevitable that's what he had to do. So in one way Sarah was right, and in another way she's probably wrong, but Derek [Brian Austin Green] has the same feeling. If you've been through it and chased by them, you're immune to it.

PC: What do you think John and Cameron felt for each other?

JF: That's a question that I would always ask, all the time. Does Cameron love John? Does John love Cameron? I certainly think there's a much better argument to be made that John loves Cameron than that Cameron loves John. Sometimes I don't like to make a definitive statement about these things because I think it's more fun for people to argue and not say, "Josh said it's not so."

I think it's sort of odd if you consider that Cameron was programmed by future John to come back and function in this way and to protect him. This is kind of an A.I. question. What's the goal of the program? What's the tactic versus what's the strategy? If the goal is to protect him and do whatever you need to do and evolve in whatever way you need to evolve in order to protect him and learn what's the best way to protect him, I guess you can say that if she learns the best way to protect him is to love him, then she loves him. If it's to simulate loving him and allowing him to love her, then that's what it is. It's pretty philosophical question to figure out what are the shades between those two things.

PC: What about Lena? What do you think about when you watch *Game of Thrones?*

JF: What do I think? I think we knew what we were doing when we cast her.

PC: I read a quote where either you or Lena said, "We've worked really hard to have Lena not be Linda Hamilton." What was it about Lena that you thought was right for the part of Sarah. Did you see a lot of actors for that role?

JF: I saw hundreds of actors. We met her late in the process because first of all she was in Great Britain. I can't remember if she was on vacation, but something happened where we couldn't get to her. I remember we were seeing hundreds of people. I mean, we saw everybody, and I was over at a friend's house, I was at a barbecue, and my friend Scott Derrickson, who ended up being the guy who directed *Doctor Strange,* said, "I know who it is." He said, "I saw this woman" — I can't remember what movie he saw her for, but he said, "I know who it is. It's Lena Headey." And I did not know who Lena Headey was at the time. *300* hadn't come out, but he said, "That's Sarah Connor."

So I went back and I said, "OK, let's see this person." And it took a while to get her to read, and when we did she had an emotional intensity to her that is kind of ferocious. I was never bothered by — I know at the time we cast her, to the degree that people were paying attention, there were definitely people who thought, "Oh, she seems kind of waify and thin," but I never thought of her that way, because I also knew she was a boxer, and she was from northern England, and having talked to her a few times I felt like, "God, she's a badass." There was nothing about her that didn't feel like a badass.

I feel like I'm most comfortable writing in one of two ways, which is either very, very spare or big monologues. I knew Sarah Connor was not going to be the monologue type, was definitely gonna be someone who spoke few words, and I thought Lena, she could just do it. She's just one of those actors who could — you see it in *Game of Thrones.* It's not like she has these big monologues. You just put a camera on her face and let her do what she does.

It's interesting: I was rewatching the second episode, and she has kind of a big bantering dialogue scene with Thomas, who's looking for turkey in the fridge, and she's on the phone and it's kind of this jokey, bantering scene. I was in the writers' room and she was on the set and they called from the set and they said, "Lena wonders whether she can do a little less of this monologue." I don't remember what the reason was — I guess she just didn't like it — but I said, "No, no, I want her to do it." I was watching it recently and I thought to myself, that was definitely one of the places where early on in the series I didn't understand — maybe I understood the power of what she could do, but I didn't understand the character as well as I thought I did. I look at it now and I say, "I should have listened to her. That's *not* a Sarah Connor phone conversation. There should have been a better way to do that." You're learning the character, you're learning the actor, and certainly that day she knew the character better than I did, and I should have listened to her.

Image via Fanpop

PC: What about Thomas? Given that John Connor is an icon to an entire army of fighters, that must have been a hard role to cast.

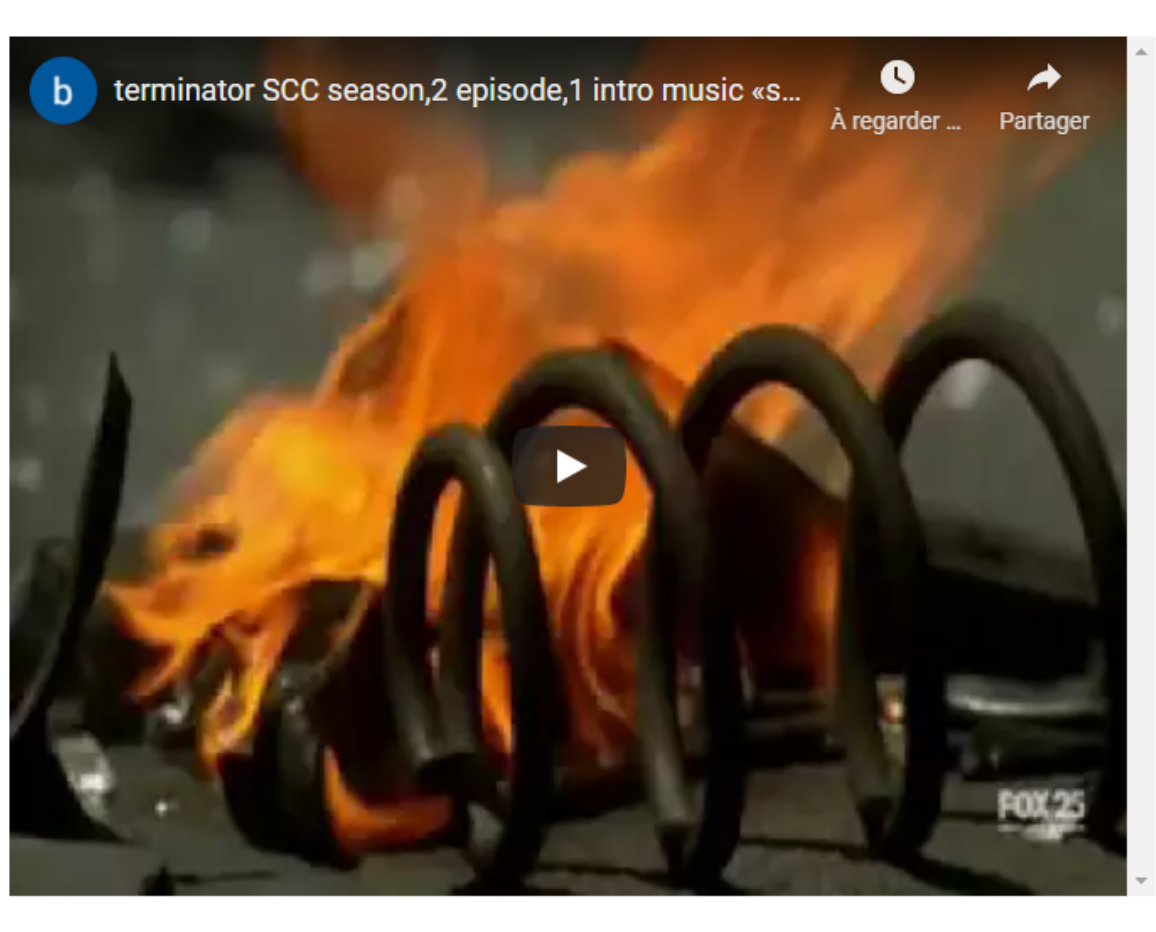
JF: This is something I've written about publicly, so I feel like I can say it: casting Thomas was the hardest thing we had to do, because of that sense of, "He's a young man, coming of age" — the network always wants that character to feel like a romantic lead as well, and there was this weird, coded pushback I felt when we were trying to cast him. We loved him immediately, and the studio loved him immediately, and the network really had a hard time getting behind him. They just kept saying to me things like, "Well, we just don't know if he feels like a romantic lead, or a leading man," and they kept bringing in these other people who were just so wrong and so much less of an actor than Thomas was, and what I kind of started to figure out — and they never said this to me, but I believe this — was that they just thought he was gay, and that he read gay. And they didn't want him.

Obviously that wasn't something I could ask them. It was something that I very much believed. And Thomas is now living his life, married to a man and very happy. At the time, he was an eighteen-year-old kid who had just come off of a controversy on *Heroes* where they had made his character gay and he had pushed back, because that wasn't what he had signed on for, and a lot of that stuff was sort of in the air at the time. And I just began to believe that that was their problem, but obviously they were never going to say that and they wouldn't say that now. So it was hard, because I felt like we were pushing against something that wouldn't be explained, and eventually he just out-acted everybody. And I think what happened was, we never gave up on him, and he never gave up on the part.

I remember I would talk to him in the parking lot after and he would say, "Why do they hate me?" And I couldn't say, "Here's why I think they hate you." And eventually he did a screen test against another kid and someone at Fox took the screen test home to their teenage daughter's sleepover and put them both on and said, "Which boy do you like better?" And all the girls at the sleepover said Thomas. And Fox came back and said, "OK, we'll cast him."

PC: You and Brian Austin Green have both referred to the original episode ten — the first one you didn't produce in season one because of the writers' strike — as the "lost episode," hinting that it was something special. What can you tell us about it?

JF: It was gonna be amazing. *I* thought it was gonna be amazing. It may have sucked, I don't know. I had this idea: in short, I would say the first five minutes of season two is what I was gonna do for forty-five minutes in episode ten. The idea for episode ten was I was gonna do a forty-five minute silent episode of Cameron crawling her way back from the explosion to save John. That's what I was gonna do, in some form, and there were gonna be a number of obstacles. She was going to have to climb something and fall in an empty pool — we had a whole kind of obstacle course, like epic thing, for her to move about two hundred meters, with no legs. We were gonna blow her legs off and have her climb and crawl to him for the whole time.



I was really excited about it. It was an episode I was writing, and it took a lot to convince the network to let me try it. They were really against it. I had to get on the phone with [Fox entertainment president} Kevin Reilly and sort of beg him. Everyone's terrified that people are gonna tune out and I kept saying, "Look, it'll be episode ten, and by episode ten you're either watching the show or you're not watching the show." No one's gonna watch that episode and think, "Oh, my God, I'm never watching this show again; they're gonna have legless people falling every episode."

I never wrote the script; I wrote an outline for it, and they were certainly skeptical. They relented. I don't know what would have happened if I had written the script and they were terrified of it. I never got that far. So we basically just did the first episode of season two, which was my sort of almost homage to the episode I didn't get to do, which is, "How did she get there," but we didn't take her legs off.

PC: Did the network request any of the changes made between seasons one and two?

JF: Yeah, they wanted the show to become more close-ended, to feel a little more "mission of the week," or at least have a stronger mission-engine potential. They also wanted to introduce a girl for John.

PC: Did they also want a girlfriend for Derek or was the choice to introduce Jesse [Stephanie Jacobsen] more organic?

Image via Warner Bros.

JF: That was more organic. And I had intended to have a girl for John, and it was gonna be the serious blonde girl who was in the high school in the first season, but once we kind of blew out the whole back half of the season we thought, "OK, we can do something different." I don't remember who had the idea of that Riley thing.

PC: I'm told you don't like to talk about what would have happened in season three, but can you tell us why Catherine Weaver [Shirley Manson] was fighting Skynet?

JF: I'll say that this was my idea conceptually, that A.I. and Skynet had been fighting the resistance for a long time, in probably many different iterations, and hadn't succeeded. I mean, the reality is that they're sending Terminators back because they've lost, right? I mean, Terminators exist as a last gasp, to turn the tide, if humanity, John Connor, beats them. And then they're gonna keep sending them back and it's a constant battle and I thought, "Wouldn't there be a moderate wing to the party?" [laughs]. I mean, like, "Why have we gone to DEFCON 1? Is it necessary?" I just thought if I were super intelligent, if I had this artificial intelligence, and I had an infinite amount of time to contemplate different ways to resolve this crisis, some part of me at some point is gonna think, "Why don't we make an alliance? Why don't we reach out? Why don't we try to solve this in a different way?" So I thought that the Weaver side was kind of an outcropping of the original A.I. — I liked the idea that the A.I. started infighting, that there could be different points of view on how to solve the conflict.

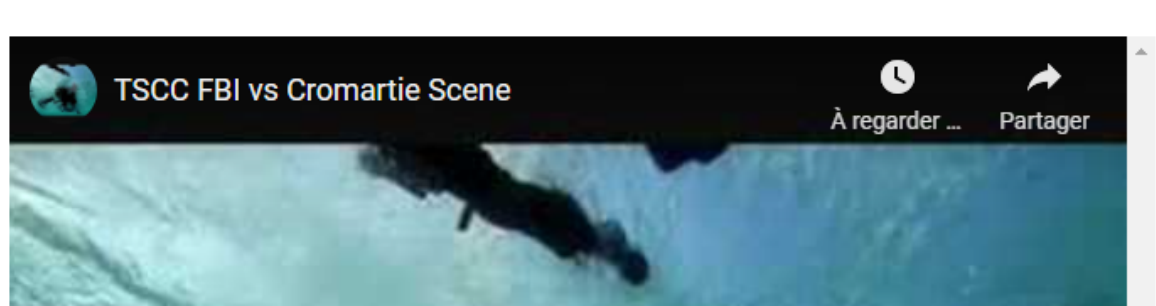
Image via Warner Bros.

PC: You should send the DVD set off to Congress. What about the religious themes? There's quite a bit of it. Where did that come from?

JF: I remember my dad called me once after reading a review from *The New York Times,* maybe, which said it was one of the most religious, Christian shows on television. And I'm Jewish, and my dad called me and goes, "What did you make? What are you doing?" I said, "That's *their* interpretation." I've always been interested in religion and science fiction. How can you not be? Here you have the apocalyptic imagery, and this goes back to the movies, I mean, John Connor, JC, Jesus Christ, you can't ignore what he [James Cameron] did with it originally, and I've always been interested in religious themes, because it fascinates me. I'm an atheist, a secular Jew, but I'm really interested in it. So I was always kinds of noodling around with it and exploring it, and it became more overt.

Richard T. Jones [who portrayed Ellison] is very religious. And he would read the Bible on Video Village while waiting to do scenes, and I would talk to him about it sometimes, and I just started thinking about it for his character. You don't really see a lot of religious figures in genre television who aren't fools, and I thought, "Why do they have to be? Couldn't they just be a very thoughtful religious man who grew up this way in the church and is now confronted with the idea of the real apocalypse and seeing these types of things he can't imagine? How does it challenge his faith? How does it affirm it?" I wanted to treat religion with respect.

PC: When I think of my favorite scenes, quite a few involve music montages, especially the last episode of season one, with the Johnny Cash song as the FBI agents are thrown into the pool. Do you have favorite scenes, where you thought the show was doing something special?



JF: The Johnny Cash shootout seems to be one of everybody's favorites. It's certainly one of mine. I'm a huge Johnny Cash fan. My son's middle name is actually Cash, after Johnny Cash. I have sheet music from Johnny Cash congratulating me on my wedding, autographed by him, because a friend of mine was his, his father was his tour manager, so he gave me that as a wedding present. That scene in particular, one of the shows that really influenced me when I was making this was *Rescue Me,* in a very specific way. What *Rescue Me* would do is, they didn't do big fire sequences every episode, but when they did them they always had an idea behind them, they were always telling a story. They never just did a fire for fire's sake. So in an episode maybe the fire would be incredibly smokey and no one could see and the whole thing was about that, or the fire is roaring and no one could hear and it was about that, or they would do it to a piece of music or whatever it was.

I would always say to the writers and the directors, "Think of every action sequence like a fire in *Rescue Me*. It has to feel like a *Terminator* action sequence, like it couldn't exist anywhere else. What is our idea? What is our character idea? What are our aesthetic principles for this scene?" In that one in particular, I just had — I don't know, one day I just came in to work and I said, " I just have this idea of shooting an entire action sequence from the bottom of a pool and see these bodies falling in, and I just want to do it and make it really beautiful." And somehow I said, "I really want to use this song. I like the apocalyptic aspect to it."

I was on strike when that episode was being edited, so I wasn't around for the editing, and James Middleton, the other executive producer, he got into a bit of a pushback with either the studio or the network because during the strike they were cutting budgets like crazy, especially in post. Because I was on strike I thought, " I'm not going go in and edit, I'm not gonna be involved at all, I'm not gonna cross the picket line," and I said to James, "You have to do this all yourself. I'm not gonna give you any advice, we can't talk about this cut or that cut, I'm not gonna even do that." And they told him, "We're not gonna use that Johnny Cash song. We don't think it works and it costs whatever it was, I don't know, twelve grand?" And James called me — I remember I was standing outside the gates of Warner Bros. — and he said, "They don't want me to use the song. They're trying to get me to cut it." And I said, "I can't give you any thoughts on that; just remember what my son's middle name is." And he said, "I know." And he pushed and got it.

In terms of other scenes that I love, I'm going to pick one that I was just watching, because before we talked I decided to watch the finale, which I hadn't watched in ten years. I actually haven't watched any episode of the show for ten years. I never watched it through again, after it was on. There's a scene in the finale where Josh Malina's FBI character comes into the jail cell where Sarah Connor sits. And he has — he's a new character who's just shown up in this episode —he's got all her files, he's seen these things happen, he's seen what's been going on, he's really smart, and he sits down next to her and he says, "I believe you. Here's what I believe has happened." And he lays out her argument: "I believe in time travel. I believe there are these things that come from the future. I believe you guys have been chased around. You should be forty-five but you look thirty-six or thirty-three, whatever. Your son should be twenty-four, he looks sixteen. I believe everything you've said and I want to help you. Just tell me where you son is." And she says, as she has said throughout the episode, "My son's dead."

Image via Warner Bros.

And I love that scene because, one, I love Josh Malina as an actor, he's one of my favorite actors and I'd been trying to get him on the show for two years. But mostly I love it because it is the tragedy of that character. That's the tragedy of Sarah Connor, which is, she's been trying to get people to believe her forever, finally someone believes her, someone in law enforcement, which is kind of her antagonist 1-A, someone finally believes her, and she can't trust him. So even faced with getting what you want — "Someone believes me, someone says I'm not crazy and I'll help you" — she still can't trust them, so she has to continue to lie and shut down and not connect. It brings tears to my eyes, that that character can't trust anybody. I love the performances in that scene — Lena's great, and you get from Josh a genuine sadness for her.

PC: Now the question I've been dreading: Do you think there's any chance we'll ever see Lena Headey as Sarah Connor again?

JF: I don't. The rights are in different places, and people are in different place. It's all been split up in different ways. I always feel bad saying that to people. People ask me that online a lot.

PC: You feel bad about it for other people or for yourself?

JF: I feel bad about it for other people.

PC: But you're over it?

JF: Well, I never get over it over it. As a writer, or as anybody, you don't wanna be the guy hanging around the old high school going, "Oh, yeah, when *I* was here . . . " You gotta live in the present, as much as you can.

Paley Matters is a publication of The Paley Center for Media.

David Bushman *has been a television curator at the Paley Center since 1992, excluding a two-year stint as program director at TV Land. He is the coauthor ofTwin Peaks FAQ: All That's Left to Know About a Place Both Wonderful and Strange (2016) and Buffy the Vampire Slayer FAQ: All That's Left to Know About Sunnydale's Slayer of Vampires, Demons, and Other Forces of Darkness (2017).*

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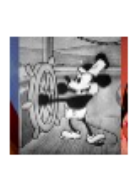

'Corporate' Avengers

David Bushman in Paley Matters

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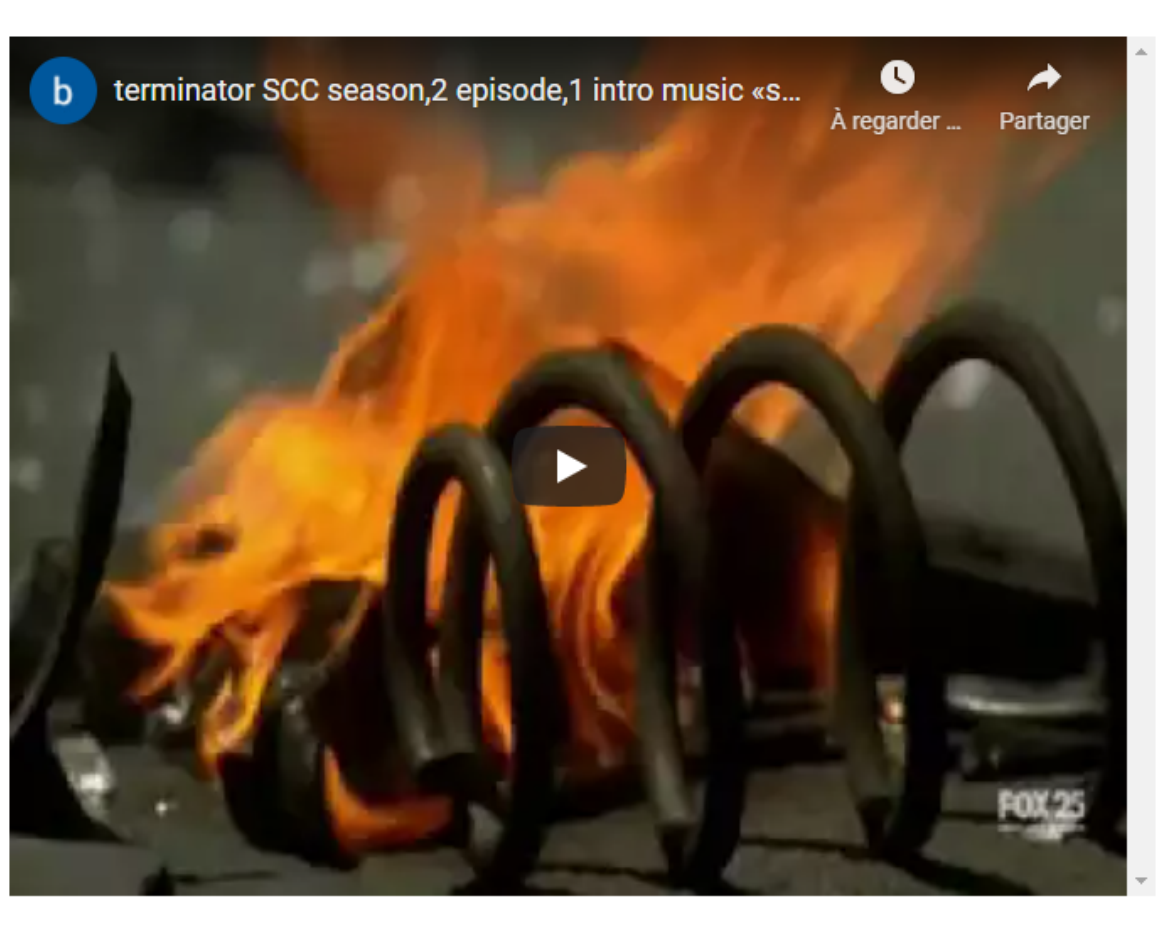
"Well, we just don't know if he feels like a romantic lead, or a leading man," and they kept bringing in these other people who were just so wrong and so much less of an actor than Thomas was, and what I kind of started to figure out — and they never said this to me, but I believe this — was that they just thought he was gay, and that he read gay. And they didn't want him.

Obviously that wasn't something I could ask them. It was something that I very much believed. And Thomas is now living his life, married to a man and very happy. At the time, he was an eighteen-year-old kid who had just come off of a controversy on *Heroes* where they had made his character gay and he had pushed back, because that wasn't what he had signed on for, and a lot of that stuff was sort of in the air at the time. And I just began to believe that that was their problem, but obviously they were never going to say that and they wouldn't say that now. So it was hard, because I felt like we were pushing against something that wouldn't be explained, and eventually he just out-acted everybody. And I think what happened was, we never gave up on him, and he never gave up on the part.

I remember I would talk to him in the parking lot after and he would say, "Why do they hate me?" And I couldn't say, "Here's why I think they hate you." And eventually he did a screen test against another kid and someone at Fox took the screen test home to their teenage daughter's sleepover and put them both on and said, "Which boy do you like better?" And all the girls at the sleepover said Thomas. And Fox came back and said, "OK, we'll cast him."

PC: You and Brian Austin Green have both referred to the original episode ten — the first one you didn't produce in season one because of the writers' strike — as the "lost episode," hinting that it was something special. What can you tell us about it?

JF: It was gonna be amazing. *I* thought it was gonna be amazing. It may have sucked, I don't know. I had this idea: in short, I would say the first five minutes of season two is what I was gonna do for forty-five minutes in episode ten. The idea for episode ten was I was gonna do a forty-five minute silent episode of Cameron crawling her way back from the explosion to save John. That's what I was gonna do, in some form, and there were gonna be a number of obstacles. She was going to have to climb something and fall in an empty pool — we had a whole kind of obstacle course, like epic thing, for her to move about two hundred meters, with no legs. We were gonna blow her legs off and have her climb and crawl to him for the whole time.



I was really excited about it. It was an episode I was writing, and it took a lot to convince the network to let me try it. They were really against it. I had to get on the phone with [Fox entertainment president} Kevin Reilly and sort of beg him. Everyone's terrified that people are gonna tune out and I kept saying, "Look, it'll be episode ten, and by episode ten you're either watching the show or you're not watching the show." No one's gonna watch that episode and think, "Oh, my God, I'm never watching this show again; they're gonna have legless people falling every episode."

I never wrote the script; I wrote an outline for it, and they were certainly skeptical. They relented. I don't know what would have happened if I had written the script and they were terrified of it. I never got that far. So we basically just did the first episode of season two, which was my sort of almost homage to the episode I didn't get to do, which is, "How did she get there," but we didn't take her legs off.

PC: Did the network request any of the changes made between seasons one and two?

JF: Yeah, they wanted the show to become more close-ended, to feel a little more "mission of the week," or at least have a stronger mission-engine potential. They also wanted to introduce a girl for John.

PC: Did they also want a girlfriend for Derek or was the choice to introduce Jesse [Stephanie Jacobsen] more organic?

Image via Warner Bros.

JF: That was more organic. And I had intended to have a girl for John, and it was gonna be the serious blonde girl who was in the high school in the first season, but once we kind of blew out the whole back half of the season we thought, "OK, we can do something different." I don't remember who had the idea of that Riley thing.

PC: I'm told you don't like to talk about what would have happened in season three, but can you tell us why Catherine Weaver [Shirley Manson] was fighting Skynet?

JF: I'll say that this was my idea conceptually, that A.I. and Skynet had been fighting the resistance for a long time, in probably many different iterations, and hadn't succeeded. I mean, the reality is that they're sending Terminators back because they've lost, right? I mean, Terminators exist as a last gasp, to turn the tide, if humanity, John Connor, beats them. And then they're gonna keep sending them back and it's a constant battle and I thought, "Wouldn't there be a moderate wing to the party?" [laughs]. I mean, like, "Why have we gone to DEFCON 1? Is it necessary?" I just thought if I were super intelligent, if I had this artificial intelligence, and I had an infinite amount of time to contemplate different ways to resolve this crisis, some part of me at some point is gonna think, "Why don't we make an alliance? Why don't we reach out? Why don't we try to solve this in a different way?" So I thought that the Weaver side was kind of an outcropping of the original A.I. — I liked the idea that the A.I. started infighting, that there could be different points of view on how to solve the conflict.

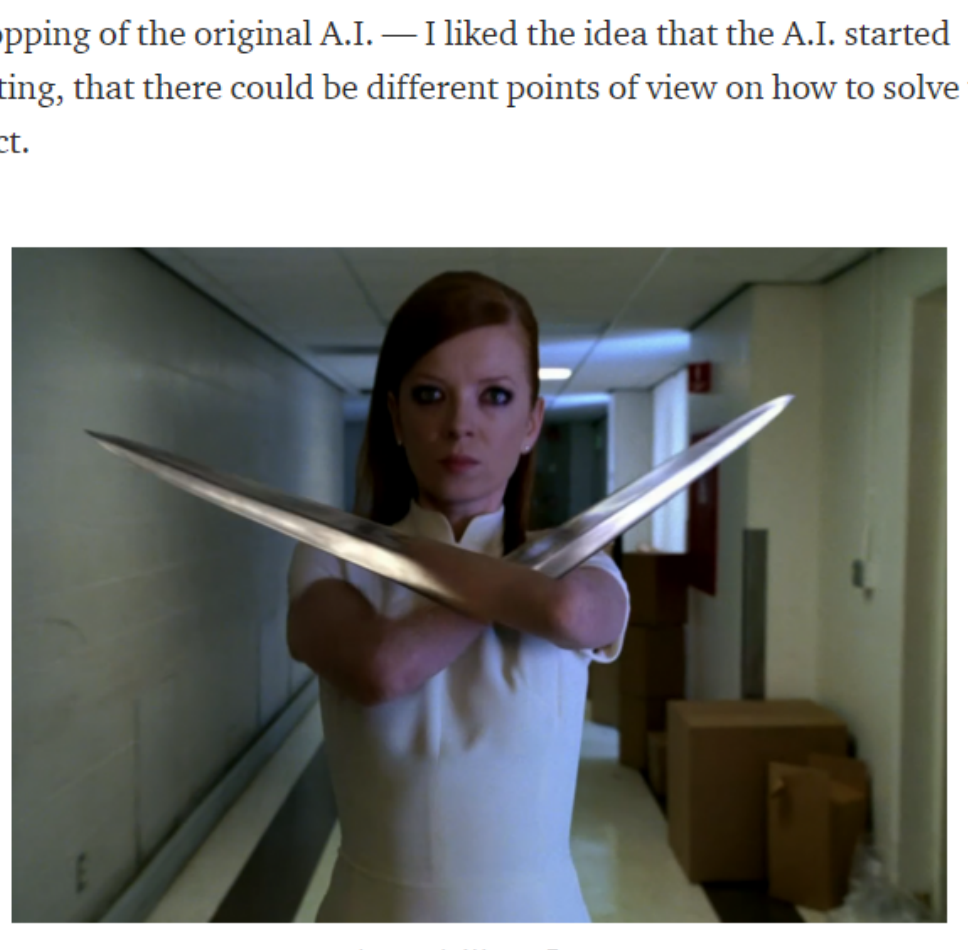


Image via Warner Bros.

PC: You should send the DVD set off to Congress. What about the religious themes? There's quite a bit of it. Where did that come from?

JF: I remember my dad called me once after reading a review from *The New York Times,* maybe, which said it was one of the most religious, Christian shows on television. And I'm Jewish, and my dad called me and goes, "What did you make? What are you doing?" I said, "That's *their* interpretation." I've always been interested in religion and science fiction. How can you not be? Here you have the apocalyptic imagery, and this goes back to the movies, I mean, John Connor, JC, Jesus Christ, you can't ignore what he [James Cameron] did with it originally, and I've always been interested in religious themes, because it fascinates me. I'm an atheist, a secular Jew, but I'm really interested in it. So I was always kinds of noodling around with it and exploring it, and it became more overt.

Richard T. Jones [who portrayed Ellison] is very religious. And he would read the Bible on Video Village while waiting to do scenes, and I would talk to him about it sometimes, and I just started thinking about it for his character. You don't really see a lot of religious figures in genre television who aren't fools, and I thought, "Why do they have to be? Couldn't they just be a very thoughtful religious man who grew up this way in the church and is now confronted with the idea of the real apocalypse and seeing these types of things he can't imagine? How does it challenge his faith? How does it affirm it?" I wanted to treat religion with respect.

PC: When I think of my favorite scenes, quite a few involve music montages, especially the last episode of season one, with the Johnny Cash song as the FBI agents are thrown into the pool. Do you have favorite scenes, where you thought the show was doing something special?